

EARLIEST CHRISTIANITY IN EGYPT: SOME OBSERVATIONS

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BIRGER A. PEARSON

Earliest Christianity in Egypt: Some Observations

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The obscurity that veils the early history of the Church in Egypt and that does not lift until the beginning of the third century constitutes a conspicuous challenge to the historian of primitive Christianity.

With these words, Colin H. Roberts, one of the most prominent papyrologists of our time, opens a ground-breaking study of early Christianity in Egypt: *Manuscript, Society, and Belief in Early Christian Egypt*.¹ Acknowledging that the extant documentary papyri provide no useful evidence for the earliest period, i.e., before the third century,² Roberts turns his attention to the evidence provided by the earliest Christian literary papyri. The importance of the results he obtains is considerable, not least because the theory of Walter Bauer that the earliest type of Christianity in Egypt was "heretical," specifically "gnostic,"³ a view widely held,⁴ is cogently called into question, if not definitively overturned.

1. The Schweich Lectures of the British Academy for 1977 (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1979).

2. Ibid., 1 and n. 2. For a valuable new study of the documentary evidence see now E. A. Judge and S. R. Pickering, "Papyrus Documentation of Church and Community in Egypt to the Mid-fourth Century," *JAC* 20 (1977) 47-71. The evidence treated includes personal correspondence, letters involving churches, official inquiries, petitions, public records, wills, other contracts, etc. The earliest evidence is dated to the early third century.

3. See W. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (trans. and ed. R. A. Kraft et al.; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977) 44-53.

4. See, e.g., Helmut Koester, "GNOMAI DIAPHORAI: The Origin and Nature of Diversification in the History of Early Christianity," in James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester, *Trajectories Through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971) 114, according to which Bauer is "essentially right." In his recent treatment of Christian

A survey of the extant Christian manuscripts (or fragments thereof) dating to the second century and preserved in Egypt is very illuminating: ten biblical manuscripts (seven Old Testament, three New Testament: Gospel of John, Matthew, Titus) and four nonbiblical (Egerton gospel, *Shepherd of Hermas*, P. Oxy. 1 = *Gospel of Thomas* 26-28, and Irenaeus *Adversus haereses*).⁵ The only possible evidence for "Gnosticism" that can be extrapolated from this list is not unambiguous: the *Gospel of Thomas*, which not everyone agrees is "gnostic."⁶ To be sure, this is evidence from the second century, not the first. Unfortunately, we have no manuscript evidence at all from the first century.

Probably the most important feature of Roberts's book is his discussion of *nomina sacra* in early Christian manuscripts and his conclusions concerning the nature and origin of earliest Christianity in Egypt based on the evidence provided by the *nomina sacra*. These *nomina sacra* consist of certain proper names and religious terms that are given special treatment in writing, usually by means of abbreviation with superlineation. The four basic ones are *Iēsous*, *Christos*, *kyrios*, and *theos*, but there are fifteen in all.⁷ Roberts argues that the use of *nomina sacra* is a Christian, not a Jewish, invention, though it is obviously influenced by the Jewish reverence for the name of God.⁸ The *nomina sacra* occur in the earliest Christian manuscripts, and Roberts argues persuasively that this scribal practice arose already in the first century in the church in Jerusalem, where a "theology of the name" was especially prominent.⁹ The starting point for the development of the *nomina sacra* is the name *Iēsous*. Early forms of the *nomen sacrum* are *IĒ* (a suspended form) and *IĒS* and *IS* (contracted forms, the latter eventually becoming standard). The form *IĒ* occurs in the

origins in Egypt, Koester still credits Bauer's thesis, though he also talks of "several competing Christian groups" in Alexandria, an important modification. See H. Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament* (2 vols.; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982) 2:219-39, esp. 219 and 220. See also the literature cited in Klijn's contribution to this book.

5. Roberts, *Manuscript*, 12-14. Of course, the term "biblical" used of NT mss. from this period is anachronistic.

6. See, e.g., Stevan L. Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom* (New York: Seabury Press, 1983).

7. The others are *pneuma*, *anthrōpos*, *stauros*, *patēr*, *huios*, *sotēr*, *mētēr*, *ouranos*, *Israēl*, *Daveid*, *Ierusalēm*. See Roberts, *Manuscript*, 27. Of course, the common names in this list occur as *nomina sacra* only in certain theologically loaded contexts.

8. Jewish mss. accord special status to the Tetragrammaton, but the *nomina sacra* are only found in Christian mss. Some scholars have argued for a Jewish origin for the *nomina sacra*; see Roberts, *Manuscript*, 26-34.

9. The early chapters of Acts tend to bear this out: see Acts 3:6; 4:7, 10, 12, 17, 18; 5:28, 40. Cf. Roberts, *Manuscript*, 41.

Egerton gospel fragment and other early papyri and is probably presupposed in the *Epistle of Barnabas* 9.8.¹⁰

Roberts's study has shed important new light on Christian origins in Egypt. He concludes that the preponderance of the evidence points to Jerusalem as the earliest source of Egyptian Christianity, that the earliest Christianity in Egypt was Jewish, and that, furthermore, the earliest Christians in Egypt would naturally have been regarded as Jews and indistinguishable as a separate religious group. It is, of course, obvious that Alexandria, the home of the largest Jewish community of the Diaspora, would have been the first place to which the earliest Christian missionaries to Egypt came.¹¹

To be sure, all of this is based on conjecture and circumstantial evidence. The fact remains that the history of Christianity in Egypt before the time of Hadrian is exceedingly obscure, but Roberts is surely correct in reminding us that our knowledge of Gnosticism in Egypt before the time of Hadrian (when Basilides and Valentinus were flourishing) is even more obscure than for non-gnostic Christianity.¹²

It has already been noted that the documentary evidence for Christianity in Egypt does not begin until the early third century. But, as Roberts points out,¹³ the earliest Christian documents would generally have been indistinguishable from Jewish ones. One important document bearing upon Judaism in first-century Alexandria, not discussed by Roberts, has sometimes been thought to contain a veiled reference to Christians. I refer to the famous letter of the Emperor Claudius to the Alexandrians, dated 10 November 41 C.E.¹⁴ The relevant passage reads as follows:

Nor are they [the Jews] to bring in or invite Jews coming from Syria or Egypt, or I shall be forced to conceive greater suspicion. If they disobey, I shall proceed against them in every way as fomenting a common plague for the whole world.¹⁵

The possibility has been entertained that "Jews coming from Syria"

10. Ibid., 35-36. *Barnabas* is probably to be placed in Alexandria; see below.

11. See Roberts, *Manuscript*, 49-73 (chap. 3: "The Character and Development of the Church").

12. Ibid., 52. He points out, for example, that there are no specifically gnostic *nomina sacra* (p. 43); and we have already noted above that the second-century manuscript evidence provides only the barest suggestion of a gnostic presence.

13. Ibid., 57-58. For the Jewish documents see V. A. Tcherikover, A. Fuks, and M. Stern, *CPJ* (3 vols.; Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1957-64).

14. *CPJ*, no. 153 (= P. Lond. 1912); cf. Tcherikover, Fuks, and Stern, *CPJ* 2:36-55.

15. Ibid., lines 96-100 (Greek text, p. 41; ET, p. 43).

could include Jewish Christian missionaries from Palestine, but obviously no certainty can be achieved on this question.¹⁶

In any case, whatever the meaning of Claudius's letter, it is clear that the earliest Christian missionaries to Alexandria would have been "Jews coming from Syria," i.e., from Palestine,¹⁷ specifically Jerusalem.

In what follows I want to take another look at the early Christian traditions pertaining to the Christian presence in Alexandria, explore the Jewish community of Alexandria as the locus of earliest Christianity in Egypt, and discuss some specific loci associated with early Alexandrian Christianity.

MISCELLANEOUS EARLY CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS

The New Testament provides only the barest hints of a Christian mission to Egypt. The Pentecost account in Acts numbers among the devout Jews in Jerusalem in attendance at Peter's sermon persons from "Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene" (Acts 2:10). The disputants in the controversy with the "Hellenist" protomartyr Stephen included Jews from Cyrene and Alexandria (Acts 6:9). The original homes of Stephen and five of his co-workers are not given, but all of them were Jews with Greek names (Acts 6:5), and some of them could have come from Alexandria.¹⁸ (Nicolaus is singled out as a convert to Judaism, a "proselyte," and is said to have come from Antioch.) In any case, the traffic between Jerusalem and Alexandria was extensive in both directions, and one might easily suppose that some Alexandrian Jews who were converted to Christianity in Palestine would have returned home to spread their faith. Such persons could have been included among the (Hellenist) Christians hounded out of Jerusalem (Acts 8:1). Unfortunately, our evidence is very scanty, not least because the author of Acts happens to tilt his geographic focus toward Asia Minor, Greece, and Rome, rather than toward Egypt and Alexandria (or, for that matter, eastward into the interior of Syria).

16. See Tcherikover's note to this passage, *CPJ* 2:53-54. Tcherikover rejects the hypothesis that the passage refers to Christians. G. M. Lee finds the hypothesis "attractive." See Lee, "Eusebius on St. Mark and the Beginnings of Christianity in Egypt," in *StPatr XII* (TU 115; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1975) 422-31, esp. 431.

17. On the name Syria as applied to Palestine see Tcherikover, Fuks, and Stern, *CPJ* 1:5 and n. 13.

18. The names Philip and Nicanor occur among the Jews of Egypt. See *ibid.* 3: appendix 2 ("Prosopography of the Jews in Egypt").

A hint of the existence of a Christian community in Egypt in the forties of our era is provided by the story in Acts of Apollos, one of Paul's co-workers in Ephesus and Corinth. He is said to have been "a Jew . . . a native of Alexandria . . . an eloquent man, powerfully trained in the scriptures" (18:24). A variant reading at Acts 18:25 asserts that this Apollos "had been instructed in the word in his home country."¹⁹ This reading, if historically accurate, would presuppose the existence of a Jewish Christian community in Alexandria by the late 40s or early 50s C.E.,²⁰ i.e., during the reign of the Emperor Claudius (41-54). But the New Testament is totally silent on the question of who the earliest organizers of the Alexandrian church might have been.

Here is where extra-canonical Christian tradition and legend attempt to fill the gap. One interesting account is provided by the pseudo-Clementine literature, specifically *Homily 1*: The young Clement, in a first-person narrative, tells of his journey from Rome to Judea to find out about the Son of God, concerning whom he had heard some reports. His ship is blown off course and comes to Alexandria, where he falls in with a Hebrew from Judea named Barnabas. This Barnabas instructs Clement in the Christian faith and then sets out for Judea to observe "the festival." Clement soon follows Barnabas to Judea and comes to Caesarea, where Barnabas introduces him to the apostle Peter (*Hom.* 1.8.3-15.9). In this account Barnabas is the only Christian identified by name in Alexandria, but "Clement" reports that he had been told by certain Alexandrian "philosophers" that they had heard about the Judean reported to be Son of God "from many who had come from there" (8.4).

Whether this reference to Barnabas's activity in Egypt was invented by the author of the Clementine romance or was based on an independent tradition is hard to say. It is not found in Eusebius nor in any other document datable before the fourth century. It is to be noted that the companion document, the *Recognitions*, places Clement's encounter with Barnabas in Rome rather than Alexandria.²¹ It is possible that the story of Barnabas's preaching in Alexandria is

19. Codex Bezae (my translation), representing the "Western Text." The same ms. also calls this man *Apollōnios* in v. 24. *Apollōs* is a short form of *Apollōnios*; cf. Silas/Silvanus (Acts 15:22, etc.; 1 Thess. 1:1, etc.).

20. The activity of Apollos in Ephesus predates the Pauline mission there (Acts 19), 52-55 C.E. For these dates see Koester, *Introduction* 2:104.

21. Ps.-Clem. *Recogn.* 1.6-12. Cf. R. A. Lipsius, *Die Apokryphen Apostelgeschichten und Apostellegenden* (2 vols.; Braunschweig: Schwetschke und Sohn, 1883-90; repr., Amsterdam: Philo, 1976) 2/2:271-73.

somehow to be traced to the diffusion of the *Epistle of Barnabas*, widely held to be of Alexandrian origin.²² In any case, that the earliest Christian missionaries came to Alexandria from Judea, as this report says, is inherently probable, even if there is reason to doubt that Barnabas was one of them.

THE MARK LEGEND

The standard tradition of the Egyptian church as to its origins is that Saint Mark the Evangelist was the founder and first bishop of the church in Alexandria.²³ It is noteworthy that the New Testament provides not the slightest hint of this tradition, though Mark is mentioned in a number of contexts. According to the book of Acts, the church in Jerusalem met in the home of Mary, mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12; the events there narrated are placed during the reign of Herod Agrippa, i.e., 41–44 C.E.). This Mark is said to have accompanied Barnabas and Paul from Jerusalem to Antioch (12:25). From there he went with them on their missionary journey to Cyprus and Asia Minor, leaving them in Perga to return to Jerusalem (13:5, 13). Later Paul refused to take Mark along on another journey, and chose Silas (Silvanus) instead (15:37–40). Mark then went with Barnabas back to Cyprus (15:39), and we hear no more of him after that in Acts. Mark turns up with Paul, as a “fellow worker,” during one of Paul’s imprisonments (Phlm. 24), probably in Ephesus ca. 54–55 C.E.²⁴ The deutero-Pauline epistle to the Colossians identifies Mark as the cousin of Barnabas (Col. 4:10); the Colossians are counseled to receive him if he comes to them. Mark is remembered in 2 Tim. 4:11 as one who had been “useful” to Paul. He may also have been at some time useful to the apostle Peter as well, for the author of 1 Peter places Mark in Rome with Peter, and has Peter refer to him as his “son,” sending greetings to the recipients of the letter in Asia Minor (1 Pet. 5:13).²⁵ Thus the New

22. R. Trevijano, “The Early Christian Church of Alexandria,” in *StPatr* XII, 471–77, esp. 471. See also below, on the *Epistle of Barnabas*.

23. For a good summary of the standard Coptic tradition see A. S. Atiya, *History of Eastern Christianity* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1967) 25–28.

24. Koester, *Introduction* 2:104, 131.

25. “Babylon” is clearly a symbolic name for Rome, and the addressees of the letter are located in northern Asia Minor (1:1). Cf. Koester, *Introduction* 2:292–95. H.-M. Schenke and K. M. Fischer argue that 1 Peter has nothing to do with the historical Peter. According to them the letter was originally ascribed to Paul; the name Peter in 1:1 is a secondary substitution for Paul; see *Einleitung in die Schriften des Neuen Testaments* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1978) 1:199–216 (vol. 1: *Die Brief des Paulus und Schriften des Paulinismus*).

Testament materials connect Mark solidly with Jerusalem, Antioch, Cyprus, Asia Minor, and (less solidly) Rome,²⁶ but nothing is said of his connection with Egypt. It is all the more surprising, therefore, that such a connection should occur in later Christian tradition.

Eusebius is usually thought to be our earliest source for the tradition placing Mark in Egypt. But we now have a fragmentary letter of Clement of Alexandria, published by Morton Smith,²⁷ according to which Mark wrote his Gospel during Peter's sojourn in Rome, and after Peter's martyrdom came to Alexandria. There he expanded his earlier Gospel, with his own and Peter's notes, and produced a "more spiritual gospel" for use in the Alexandrian church, a gospel the Carpocratian heretics subsequently falsified and misused.²⁸ This fragment says nothing of Mark's role as founder of the Alexandrian church. To the contrary, it implies that the church there was already in existence when Mark arrived from Rome after Peter's death. Nothing is said of any earlier sojourn of Mark in Alexandria, though this is not necessarily excluded by the wording of the fragment.

Eusebius's account of Mark's activity in Alexandria follows immediately upon that of the activity of Mark and Peter in Rome, and reads as follows:

They say that this Mark was the first to be sent to preach in Egypt the Gospel which he had also put into writing, and was the first to establish churches in Alexandria itself. The number of men and women who were there converted at the first attempt was so great, and their asceticism was so extraordinarily philosophic, that Philo thought it right to describe their conduct and assemblies and meals and all the rest of their manner of life.²⁹

26. The earliest extra-canonical testimony to Mark's activity in Rome as a follower (and "interpreter") of Peter is provided by Papias, who may have extrapolated this from 1 Pet. 5:13. Papias adds information on the writing of the Gospel of Mark in this connection. See Eusebius *H. E.* 2.15.1-2; 3.39.15. Cf. also Schenke and Fischer, *Einleitung* 1:200.

27. *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1973).

28. I am here summarizing the relevant portion of the text of the letter (text, p. 448; ET, p. 446). I accept the authenticity of the Clement fragment, but I do not accept Morton Smith's theories pertaining to the "Secret Gospel of Mark." Incidentally, this new fragment of Clement is of special interest in connection with John Chrysostom's testimony (*hom. 1 in Matt.*) that Mark wrote his Gospel in Egypt. See Lipsius, *Apostelgeschichten* 2/2:322.

29. *H. E.* 2.16; Kirsopp Lake's translation in the LCL edition, here and elsewhere. Eusebius goes on to summarize Philo's account of the Therapeutae (cf. Philo *Vit. Cont.*) in the belief that these Jewish ascetics were Christians. This belief was solidly established in the church down to modern times.

This information is supplemented by Eusebius in his *Chronicle*, according to which Mark arrived in Alexandria in the third year of Claudius, i.e., in 43 C.E.³⁰

Though Eusebius says nothing here of Mark's role as a bishop, he later reports the accession of Annianus in 62 C.E. in the following terms:

In the eighth year of the reign of Nero Annianus was the first after Mark the Evangelist to receive charge of the diocese of Alexandria.³¹

Some observations regarding these statements are in order. Regarding the first, the words, "they say," imply that Eusebius is passing along a previously existing tradition.³² One could also infer from the immediately preceding context that it was Peter who sent Mark to Egypt, an inference actually made in later accounts of the tradition.³³ The Gospel of Mark is closely associated with this tradition, but the presence in Alexandria of the Gospel of Mark as early as the third year of Claudius, when the *Chronicle* reports that Mark arrived in Alexandria, is clearly problematical. The notice in the *Chronicle*, however, could be taken to imply that Eusebius allowed for more than one visit of Mark to Alexandria, such as the later accounts, in fact, explicitly relate.³⁴

As to the statement concerning the accession of Annianus, this is

30. According to the Latin reworking of Eusebius by Jerome. See Rudolf Helm, ed., *Die Chronik des Hieronymus*, in *Eusebius Werke* (GCS 47; rev. ed.; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1956) 7:7: third year of the 205th Olympiad. According to the Armenian version of Eusebius, Mark arrived in Alexandria in the first year of the 205th Olympiad, i.e., 41 C.E. See Alfred Schoene, ed., *Eusebii Chronicorum canonum quae supersunt* (2 volumes; Dublin and Zurich: Weidmann, 1967) 2:152. This is the date noted by Lipsius (*Apostelgeschichten* 2/2:322). On the *Chronicle* of Eusebius (which was written before his *Ecclesiastical History*), see Alden A. Mosshammer, *The Chronicle of Eusebius and Greek Chronographic Tradition* (Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell Univ. Press, 1979); cf. Robert M. Grant, *Eusebius as Church Historian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980) esp. 3-10. The *Paschal Chronicle* places the arrival of Mark in Alexandria two years before the accession of Claudius, i.e., in 39 C.E.; see PG 92.560A. Severus (Sawirus 'ibn al-Muqaffa), bishop of al-Ashmunein, states that Peter sent Mark to Alexandria "in the fifteenth year after the Ascension of Christ." See B. Evetts, ed., *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria* (PO 1/2; Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1948) 140. Cf. n. 47 below. Severus's rival, Eutychius of Alexandria (also of the tenth century), specifies the ninth year of Claudius (49-50 C.E.). See his *Annales*, as rendered into Latin from Arabic, PG 111.982A.

31. H. E. 2.24. In the very next section Eusebius reports on the Neronian persecution in Rome and the deaths of Peter and Paul.

32. G. M. Lee marshalls a great deal of evidence from Greek literature to show that *phasi*, "they say," can be taken to mean that Eusebius was drawing on written records for this information. See "Eusebius on St. Mark," 425-27.

33. E.g., Epiphanius *Haer.* 51.6; Severus of al-Ashmunein (n. 30 above); and the Byzantine church historian Nicephorus Callistus, PG 145.792C.

34. E.g., *The Acts of Mark*, on which see below. Does the phrase "at the first attempt," *ek prôtēs epibolēs* (H. E. 2.16.2), hint at this?

clearly derived from a bishop list of the church of Alexandria.³⁵ It is noteworthy that Eusebius does not report the death of Mark in connection with the accession of Annianus.³⁶ He obviously knows nothing of the martyrdom of Mark.

This brings us to the *Acts of Mark* (*Passio*, April 25). The basic document exists in two Greek recensions and was rendered into several other languages. It also underwent various expansions and additions.³⁷ The story can be summarized as follows:³⁸

When the apostles were sent out, Mark received as his lot the country of Egypt and its surrounding territories (1). He came first to Cyrene,³⁹ where he did many marvelous works and converted many to the faith. While there he received a vision that he should go to Pharos in Alexandria, and the brethren sent him off on a ship with their blessings (2). Mark arrived in Alexandria the next day and came to a place called Mendion.⁴⁰ As he was entering the gate of the city, the strap of his sandal broke, and he went to a cobbler to have it fixed. The cobbler, working on the sandal, injured his left hand and cried out, "God is One [εἰς θεός]." Mark healed the hand in the name of Jesus Christ, and was invited to the home of the cobbler (3). There Mark

35. Such a list is posited for the second-century Alexandrian church by Lipsius, *Apostelgeschichten* 2/2:323., Eusebius is usually thought to be relying on Julius Africanus's *Chronographies*. See Grant, *Eusebius*, 52.

36. Jerome reports that Mark died in the eighth year of Nero and was buried in Alexandria, Annianus succeeding him. This is probably read out of Eusebius's account. See *Vir.* III. 8.

37. The two recensions, represented by mss. in Paris and the Vatican, are printed respectively in PG 115, cols. 164–69, and in the *Acta Sanctorum* (rev. ed.; Paris: Palmé, 1863–1940) 12: April, 3, XXXVIII–XL. They differ basically only in the opening and concluding passages. The *Acts* underwent several expansions in Greek, one of which has recently been published (F. Halkin, "Actes inédits de saint Marc," *AnBoll* 87 [1969] 343–71), a fabulous piece of hagiography utterly devoid of historical value. Lipsius (*Apostelgeschichten* 2/2:329) mentions Latin, Arabic, and Ethiopic versions, but there also exist scattered fragments of a Coptic version. See, e.g., T. Lefort, "Fragment coptesahidique du Martyre de St.-Marc," in *Mélanges d'histoire offerts à Charles Moeller* (Louvain: Bureaux du Recueil; Paris: Picard et fils, 1914) 1:226–31; and O. von Lemm, "Zur Topographie Alexandriens," *Kleine Koptische Studien* XLI (repr. ed.; Leipzig: Zentralantiquariat der DDR, 1972) 253–57. See also *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca* (3d ed.; Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1957) 2:77–79, nos. 1035–38; *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina* (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1900–1901) 783–84, nos. 5272–92; *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Orientalis* (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1910) 134–35, nos. 596–604. A very important Ethiopic version has recently been published, which is closely related to the basic Greek version and manifestly translated directly from Greek. See Getatchew Haile, "A New Ethiopic Version of the Acts of St. Mark," *AnBoll* 99 (1981) 117–34.

38. This summary, with chapter divisions, is based on the PG version (Paris ms.).

39. The other version adds that he was a native of Cyrene; the new Ethiopic version has the same variant.

40. The other version and the Ethiopic have "Bennidion." On this place see below.

began to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, son of God, son of Abraham, telling the man of the prophecies related to Christ. The man said that he did not know of these writings, though he was familiar with the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* and other things that Egyptians learned from childhood. But the man was eventually converted, and he and his whole household were baptized, and many others besides. The man's name was Ananias (4).⁴¹

Eventually the pagan people of the city, hearing that a Galilean had come to do away with idolatry, sought to kill him. Mark ordained for the church Ananias (Annianus) as bishop, three presbyters (Milaius, Sabinus, and Cerdo),⁴² seven deacons, and eleven other persons for special service, and returned to Pentapolis. When he came back to Alexandria after two years he found the community flourishing, a church having been built in a place called Boukolou, near the seashore (5). The pagans, meanwhile, were very angry at Mark for all of his mighty works (6). On the occasion of a paschal celebration, which occurred on the same day as a Sarapis festival, Pharmouthi 29 (= April 24),⁴³ the pagans seized Mark at the service, put a rope around his neck, and said, "Let us drag the *boubalos* in Boukolou."⁴⁴ They dragged him thus, the holy Mark giving thanks to Christ all the while, and that evening they threw his bloodied body into a prison (7). During the night Mark was visited first by an angel and then by Christ himself, receiving words of encouragement (8).

The next morning the pagan crowds dragged him again, and Mark expired. The mobs built a fire in the place called Angeloi⁴⁵ and put the body of Mark on it, but a great storm arose, and the pagan crowds fled in terror (9). The faithful rescued the body and brought it to where the services were going on. They prepared the body according to custom, and placed it in a stone tomb, located to the east of the city. Mark the evangelist and protomartyr of the Alexandrian church died on Phar-

41. The other version and the Ethiopic have Anianus. See below for discussion of the name.

42. The other versions (Vat. and new Ethiopic) have Milius, Sabinus, and Cerdo. Milius = Abilius, second bishop after Annianus (Eusebius, *H. E.* 3.14); Cerdo is the successor to Abilius (*H. E.* 3.21). Sabinus may be a corruption of the name of Primus, successor to Cerdo (*H. E.* 4.1). Cf. Lipsius, *Apostelgeschichten* 2/2:333 n. 3. According to the *Apostolic Constitutions* 7.46, Mark ordained Annianus as the first bishop of Alexandria, and Luke the evangelist ordained Abilius as the second.

43. The Paris ms. wrongly reads Pharmouthi 26; the Vatican ms. leaves out the date, but it is correct in the new Ethiopic version.

44. *boubalos* = "buffalo"; *ta boukolou* can mean "cow pastures." See below on *boukolou*.

45. On this name see below.

mouth 30 (= April 25), when Gaius Tiberius Caesar was emperor (10).⁴⁶

The *Acts of Mark* constitutes one of the basic sources of Severus's *History of the Patriarchs*,⁴⁷ and is also utilized by the author of the Arabic *Synaxary* of the Coptic church (thirteenth century).⁴⁸ The question arises as to whether or not any of this late material can be credited with historical value. At least one western scholar thinks so. F. Pericoli-Ridolfini has made an attempt to reconstruct the outline of Mark's life, using mainly the *Synaxary*, Eusebius, and the New Testament.⁴⁹ His conclusions cannot be discussed in detail here, but the main points are of interest to us. He posits several visits on the part of Mark to Alexandria, beginning in 43 C.E.,⁵⁰ and connects the martyrdom of Mark with the pogrom against the Jews conducted by the Roman prefect of Alexandria, Tiberius Alexander, in 66 C.E.⁵¹ One valuable feature of Pericoli-Ridolfini's work is that he places Mark's activities, and earliest Alexandrian Christianity in general, firmly in the context of Alexandrian Judaism.

There are, nevertheless, some basic obstacles in the way of treating these late accounts, including the *Acts of Mark*, as straight history. In

46. The Latin version of Surianus has, more plausibly, Claudius Nero Caesar (Nero Claudius Caesar, 54–68 C.E.); see PG 115.170. The other Greek version adds a description of Mark's physical appearance; this is absent from the new Ethiopic version.

47. Cf. n. 30. Severus's biography of Mark is based on three sources: Eusebius (= Evetts, 140), the *Acts of Mark* (=Evetts, 141–48), and another source, otherwise unknown, telling of Mark's early life in Cyrene (cf. n. 39), his move to Palestine, and his activities there as one of the "seventy disciples" (= Evetts, 135–40). Cf. T. Orlandi, "Le fonti copte della Storia dei Patriarchi di Alessandria," in his *Studi Copti* (TDSA 22; Milan: Istituto editoriale cisalpino, 1968) 51–86, esp. 75; but Orlandi overlooks the short paragraph based on Eusebius, *H. E.* 2.16. On Severus's methods of research, see F. R. Farag, "The Technique of Research of a Tenth Century Christian Arab Writer: Severus ibn al-Muqaffa," *Muséon* 86 (1973) 37–66. On the various lists of the "seventy disciples" and Mark's place in them (Ps.-Dorotheus et al.) see D. Theodor Schermann, *Propheten- und Apostellegenden nebst Jungerkatalogen des Dorotheus und verwandter Texte* (TU 31/3; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1907) 133–353, esp. 285–87.

48. See René Basset, *Le synaxaire arabe jacobite (rédaction copte)* (PO 16/2; Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1922) 4:344–47 (Barmoudah 30, Arabic and French); I. Forget, *Synaxarium Alexandrinum* (CSCO 90, *Scriptores Arabici* 13, 1926) 2:96–97 (Barmūdah 30, Latin). On this synaxary see O. H. E. Burmester, "On the Date and Authorship of the Arabic Synaxarium of the Coptic Church," *JTS* 39 (1938) 249–53.

49. F. Pericoli-Ridolfini, "Le origini della Chiesa d'Alessandria d'Egitto," *Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Rendiconti* (Classe di scienze mor., 1962) 17:317–43.

50. Based on Eusebius's *Chronicle* (cf. n. 30); see *ibid.*, 320–21. Pericoli-Ridolfini's reconstruction is rather complicated, made all the more so by his placing Colossians and Philemon in Rome, and by his acceptance of the authenticity of the pastoral epistles, which forces him to send Mark back to Rome and Asia Minor after the ordination of Annianus in 62. See pp. 319–20, 324–28.

51. *Ibid.*, 327–28. See Josephus *Bell.* 2.487–98; and cf. n. 70.

his discussion of the dating of the *Acts*, which he places at the end of the fourth, or the beginning of the fifth, century, Lipsius summarizes the matter as follows:

Vermutlich schon längere Zeit vor ihrer Abfassung zeigte man in Alexandrien das Grabmal der Evangelisten *en topoïs Boukolou* und erzählte sich von seinem Märtyrertod. Die nähere Ausführung der Legende haben dann wol erst die *Acten* gebracht.⁵²

But it is precisely the martyrdom of Mark that is most problematical, in view of the lateness of its attestation. Apart from the *Acts* itself, the earliest testimonies are accounts relating to the *martyrium* of Saint Mark: In the *Lausiaca History* of Palladius (early fifth century), there is a story of a presbyter from Galatia by the name of Philoromus who visited Alexandria and prayed in the *Martyrion* of Mark.⁵³ And in the *Passio S. Petri*,⁵⁴ the story of the martyrdom of Peter, Archbishop of Alexandria (d. 25 November 311), it is reported that the wall of the prison in which Peter was being held was breached and the soldiers then took him to Boukolou, where he prayed at the tomb of Saint Mark the evangelist and protomartyr, after which he was beheaded. Lipsius entertained the possibility that the *Passio* of Peter is a fourth-century witness to the *Acts of Mark*,⁵⁵ but subsequent scholarship has shown that the story of Peter's praying at the tomb of Mark (together with other features of the text) is a later addition to the original fourth-century account of the death of Peter.⁵⁶

That the added material in the *Passio S. Petri* pertaining to Saint Mark the protomartyr is closely related to the *Acts of Mark* cannot be denied. But how is this relationship to be explained? I would suggest that the developing legend surrounding the death of Bishop Peter, the "Last Martyr" of Egypt,⁵⁷ led to the development of a story according to

52. Lipsius, *Apostelgeschichten* 2/2:346.

53. *H. Laus.* 45.

54. BHG 1502 = J. Viteau, ed., *Passions des saints Ecaterine et Pierre d'Alexandrie, Barbara, et Anyisia* (Paris: Bouillon, 1897) 69–85, esp. 77.

55. Lipsius, *Apostelgeschichten* 2/2:338–39.

56. See esp. William Telfer, "St. Peter of Alexandria and Arius," *AnBoll* 67 (1949) 117–30.

57. *Passio*, Viteau, ed., *Passions des saints*, 77. This very common term for Peter is even attributed to the martyr himself in a Coptic letter-fragment attributed to him! In that document, Peter reports a divine voice commanding him to return to Alexandria and addressing him as "Peter, the last martyr" (*Petros phaem martyros*). See Carl Schmidt, *Fragmente einer Schrift des Märtyrerbischofs Petrus von Alexandrien* (TU 20; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1901) 4 (Coptic text), and 5 (ET). Schmidt (too optimistically!) accepts the authenticity of this fragment.

which Mark, the first bishop of Alexandria, also suffered a martyr's death, thus becoming the first of the martyrs of Egypt.⁵⁸ The mode of Mark's death could have been suggested by an actual event involving another bishop of Alexandria during the time of Julian the Apostate. George, an Arian bishop, was dragged through the streets of Alexandria by an enraged pagan mob and put to death.⁵⁹ The account of Mark's martyrdom would, in that case, have emerged as an addition to an earlier tradition that Mark died and was buried in Alexandria. The account of Mark's activity and his burial in the area of the city called Boukolou is probably a reminiscence of an old local tradition.⁶⁰

Before leaving the *Acts of Mark* some additional comments are in order. It is to be noted that there is no reference to Jews or Judaism in it, though later expansions of the story of the martyrdom specify that Jews were involved in Mark's death.⁶¹ I would explain this feature of the *Acts* as a reminiscence of the fact that the earliest Christians in Alexandria were Jews. Other pointers in the same direction include the name of Mark's first convert, Ananias (= Hananiah),⁶² and the account of Mark's appeal to the Old Testament in his preaching of Christ.⁶³

To sum up: The tradition of the association of St. Mark with earliest Christianity in Egypt is traceable to the second century and may originate even earlier. The historicity of this tradition, though unprovable, should not be ruled out.⁶⁴ Indeed the tradition of the preaching of

58. The close association of Peter with Mark may even apply to the relics of Saint Mark. There is a possibility that the head of Saint Mark in the Cathedral of Saint Mark in Alexandria is actually that of Peter! See Otto Meinardus, *Christian Egypt Ancient and Modern* (2d ed.; Cairo: American Univ. in Cairo Press, 1977) 37-38.

59. Ammianus Marcellinus 20.11.8-10; cf. Socrates *H. E.* 3.2; Sozomen *H. E.* 5.7. On Arius's connection with the church in Boukolou, see below. This treatment of people seems to have been all too common in Alexandria. Josephus mentions that three fleeing Jews were "dragged off to be burnt alive" during the pogrom of 66 C.E. (*Bell.* 2.492; cf. n. 51), but it can hardly be argued that one or more of these was a Christian, much less Mark himself. Cf. also Philo *Leg. Gai.*, for similar attacks on Jews during the time of Caligula.

60. See below on Boukolou.

61. See, e.g., Halkin, "Actes inédits" (cf. n. 37) 366-70. The hostility of Jews against Christians is a stock feature in many martyrdoms, e.g., *Mart. Pol.* 12.2; 17.2.

62. This variant of the name Annianus may be original. There are three occurrences of "Ananias" in the Prosopography of the Jews in Egypt (Tcherikover, Fuks, and Stern, *CPJ* 3:169). "Annianus" is an alternative Hellenization of the Hebrew name; see Pericoli-Ridolfini, "Le origini," 324.

63. The detail that Ananias was ignorant of the Scriptures, only acquainted with the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* (*Acts* 4), is a fanciful addition to an earlier form of the story.

64. See, e.g., L. W. Barnard, "St. Mark and Alexandria," *HTR* 57 (1964) 145-50; and Lee, "Eusebius." Walter Bauer propounds a completely different opinion, viz., that it was the Roman church, the defender of "orthodoxy," that "placed at the disposal of ortho-

Mark in Alexandria may antedate the acceptance of the canonical Gospel of Mark in the Alexandrian church.⁶⁵ And even if we acknowledge, as we must, that Eusebius was wrong in connecting the Jewish community of the Therapeutae with Mark's first converts,⁶⁶ we should nevertheless acknowledge that he was correct in stressing that the "apostolic men" of the days of Philo and Mark were "of Hebrew origin and thus still preserved most of the ancient customs in a strictly Jewish manner."⁶⁷ It was probably not until the early second century that Christians emerged as a group, or groups, distinct from the Jewish community.

THE LOCUS: ALEXANDRIAN JUDAISM

We are relatively well informed about the Jewish community of Alexandria in the Hellenistic-Roman period, the largest and most important of the Greek-speaking Diaspora. For the first century Philo and Josephus are our main literary sources, and this evidence is supplemented by documentary material.⁶⁸ The Jews were constituted as a *politeuma*, with their own political and legal structures, and they were encouraged by official Roman policy to live according to their own ancestral customs.⁶⁹ The Jewish population in Alexandria numbered in the hundreds of thousands.⁷⁰ According to Strabo,⁷¹ a great part of the

dox Alexandria the figure of Mark as founder of the church and apostolic initiator of the traditional succession of bishops," presumably in the time of Demetrius (189-231), the first orthodox bishop according to Bauer. See *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, 53-58 and 60.

65. Roberts (*Manuscript*, 59, 61) calls attention to the paucity of evidence in Egypt for the Gospel of Mark before the fourth century. He has revised his earlier views to the effect that the tradition of the founding of the Alexandrian church by Mark is bound up with the arrival in Alexandria of the Gospel of Mark. See *Manuscript*, 59 n. 5.

66. See above, and n. 29.

67. *H. E.* 2.17.2.

68. The available material has been admirably sifted by Tcherikover in his *Prolegomena* to *CPJ* 1:1-111. The Jewish inscriptions from Egypt are also included as an appendix in *CPJ* 3:138-66 (Alexandria: 138-41). See also E. Mary Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule: From Pompey to Diocletian* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), esp. 220-55, 364-68, 389-412, and 516-19; articles by M. Stern, S. Safrai, and S. Appelbaum, in *The Jewish People in the First Century: Historical Geography, Political History, Social, Cultural, and Religious Life and Institutions* (CRINT 1/1; Philadelphia: Fortress Press; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1974); John J. Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora* (New York: Crossroad, 1983) esp. 102-34; and Henry Green's contribution to this volume.

69. See, e.g., the aforementioned letter of Claudius (n. 14), lines 82-88.

70. Philo (*Flacc.* 43) claims that in his time there were at least a million Jews in Egypt. How many lived in Alexandria is not known, but the number was doubtless high. Cf. Tcherikover's cautious remarks, *CPJ* 1:4. Josephus reports that 50,000 Jews were killed during the massacre of 66 C.E. perpetrated by Philo's apostate nephew, Tiberius

city of Alexandria had been allocated to the Jews. Philo reports that the city was divided into five quarters named after the first letters of the alphabet, and "two of these are called Jewish because most of the inhabitants are Jews, though in the rest also there are not a few Jews scattered about."⁷² During a vicious pogrom in 37–38 C.E. the Jews of Alexandria were ejected from four of the "letters" and crowded into a small part of one. "The Jews were so numerous that they poured out over beaches, dunghills and tombs, robbed of their belongings."⁷³

Philo does not tell us which "letters" were predominantly Jewish. Josephus, in the context of his discussion of the pogrom of 66 C.E. in his *Jewish War*, reports that the Jews had been assigned a quarter of their own (τόπον ἰδίου) by the successors of Alexander the Great. Josephus goes on to describe how the Roman troops let loose by Tiberius Alexander "rushed to the quarter of the city called 'Delta,' where the Jews were concentrated," and massacred them in large numbers.⁷⁴ In his treatise *Against Apion* Josephus quotes Apion to the effect that the Jews came from Syria and settled "by a sea without a harbour, close beside the spot where the waves break on the beach." Josephus claims that this is Alexandria's "finest residential quarter," located "near the palaces."⁷⁵ The area specified can easily be identified as the north-eastern section of the city, east of Cape Lochias (modern Silsileh). It is usually assumed that the area described here is the same as that referred to in the *Jewish War* as Delta.⁷⁶ But this identification is rendered highly doubtful by the evidence of a papyrus document of 13 B.C.E. that refers to the Kibotos harbor located "in Delta."⁷⁷ The Kibotos

Alexander, prefect of Egypt and governor of Alexandria (*Bell.* 2.497). As noted above, Pericoli-Ridolfini places the death of Mark in this context.

71. Quoted in Josephus *Ant.* 14.117 from an otherwise lost portion of Strabo's *Geography*. In his famous description of the city of Alexandria in Bk. 17 Strabo does not refer to the Jewish quarters.

72. *Flacc.* 55, Colson's translation in the LCL edition, here and elsewhere. Other writers (e.g., Ps.-Callisthenes 1.32) mention the five "letters." On this and other aspects of Alexandrian topography see the invaluable work by A. Calderini ("Alexandria," in *DNGT* 1/1); and now equally indispensable, the work of A. Adriani (*RAEGR*). On an interesting inventory of buildings in the five quarters embedded in the *Chronicle* of Michael bar Elias (twelfth century), see P. M. Fraser, "A Syriac *Notitia Urbis Alexandrinae*," *JEA* 37 (1951) 103–8.

73. *Flacc.* 56; cf. *Leg. Gai.* 124–27.

74. *Bell.* 2.488, 495.

75. *Ap.* 2.33–36.

76. So even P. M. Fraser in his monumental work *Ptolemaic Alexandria* (3 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972) 1:55. He does take note of the problem posed by the papyrus; see 2:109 n. 270.

77. *BGU* 1151, lines 40–41: ἐν τῷ Δ . . . πρὸς τῇ κειβώτῳ. *Keibōtōi*.

was a small harbor within the larger western harbor called Eunostos.⁷⁸ Accordingly, the Delta quarter must have been located in the north-western part of the city and was presumably one of the two Jewish quarters referred to by Philo.⁷⁹ One can reconcile the apparently contradictory evidence by supposing that during the pogroms of 38 and 66, described by Philo and Josephus respectively, the Jews were driven into the northeastern section during the first one and the northwestern section (Delta) during the second one.⁸⁰ The northeastern section, described by Josephus, was probably the oldest and most prominent Jewish quarter. We do not know what letter was assigned to it.⁸¹ In any case, the location of the two Jewish areas at opposite ends of the city, northeast and northwest, accords well with such archaeological evidence as we have, i.e., the discovery locations of the two extant synagogue inscriptions from Alexandria.⁸²

The religious life of the Jews of Alexandria was centered in the synagogues. Philo reports that there were many synagogues (*pro-seuchai*) in the city, located in all the districts. Of these, one is singled out as "the largest and most notable." During the pogrom in the time of Gaius Caligula all the synagogues had been desecrated with images, and the chief synagogue had a bronze statue placed in it, mounted on a four-horse chariot that had been hastily requisitioned from the Gymnasium.⁸³ It is this synagogue that is doubtless referred to in a famous description preserved in rabbinic sources. This synagogue, "the glory of Israel," is described as a double-colonnade basilica so large that the *hazan* had to wave a scarf to signal the people at the other end of the building when to say amen during the prayers. According to the same account this synagogue was destroyed by the emperor Trajan,

78. Strabo 17.1.10.

79. So RAEGR 1:239.

80. See Flacc. 55-56 and Bell. 2.495, discussed above. Josephus would presumably have known that there were two Jewish quarters in Alexandria, though he does not specifically mention this fact. Josephus had visited Alexandria himself in ca. 70 C.E. (*Vita* 415).

81. The only quarters expressly mentioned in the eight documents from Alexandria of the early Roman period published in *CPJ* (nos. 142-49) are Delta and Beta. See A. Fuks's discussion in *CPJ* 2:1-2. But Beta seems to have been located in the central part of the city. See Adriani, *Repertorio* 1:239.

82. No. 1432 (first century B.C.E.) was found in Gabbary in the western part of the city, and no. 1433 (second century B.C.E.) in Hadra in the eastern part of town. See Tcherikover, Fuks, and Stern, *CPJ* 3:139. Both Gabbary and Hadra were necropolis areas in antiquity.

83. *Leg. Gai.* 132-35; cf. *Flacc.* 41.

presumably during the revolt of 115–117 C.E.⁸⁴ This synagogue was probably located in the main Jewish area in the northeastern section of the city, though no trace of it has ever been found.⁸⁵ The one synagogue from the Diaspora uncovered by archaeologists that is most comparable to the Alexandrian synagogue described in the rabbinic sources is the one at Sardis in Asia Minor.⁸⁶

It is to be expected that, in such a large and well-established Jewish population as existed in first-century Alexandria, a considerable degree of religious and cultural diversity would be found. For example, Philo and the author of 3 Maccabees represent opposite points of view regarding the issue of acculturation and participation in the larger Greek community.⁸⁷ From the various writings of Philo alone we can obtain a good picture of the range of attitudes toward the law found among the Jews of Alexandria, from a strict literalist interpretation to an espousal of the kind of allegorical interpretation represented by Philo himself, from a total rejection of the Scriptures and their "myths" to a spiritual reading of the Scriptures leading to a rational abandonment of the observances of ritual law.⁸⁸ Apocalyptic and gnostic groups were also probably present in the Alexandrian Jewish community.⁸⁹ Many Jews also chose the path of total cultural assimilation and apostasy.⁹⁰ Philo's own nephew, Tiberius Alexander, is the most famous case of this. On the other hand, a number of Gentiles affiliated with the Jewish religious community as proselytes.⁹¹

84. *t. Sukk.* 4.6; *y. Sukk.* 5.1; *b. Sukk.* 51b. The tradition is attributed to R. Judah b. Illai. The passage is quoted and commented on in E. R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1953) 2:85–86.

85. Philo's discussion of the desecration of the chief synagogue (*Leg. Gai.* 135) suggests that it was located not far from the Gymnasium that was situated on the main east-west street, Via Canopica (modern Horriya Street), probably not far from the main Jewish quarter. See Strabo *Geography* 17.1.10.

86. See now esp. Andrew R. Seager and A. Thomas Kraabel, "The Synagogue and the Jewish Community," in *Sardis from Prehistoric to Roman Times: Results of the Archaeological Exploration of Sardis 1958–1975* (ed. George M. A. Hanfmann; Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1983) 168–90, and literature cited there. Kraabel offers a specific comparison between the Sardis synagogue and that of Alexandria (p. 188).

87. See Tcherikover's discussion of this issue in *CPJ* 1:67–75.

88. See, e.g., *Conf.* 2–14; *Mig.* 89–93.

89. For Gnosticism see my article, "Friedländer Revisited: Alexandrian Judaism and Gnostic Origins," *Studia Philonica* 2 (1973) 23–39; see Koester, *Introduction* 1:225–29, for a brief discussion of pre-Christian Gnosticism in Egypt. For apocalypticism see now esp. Martin Hengel, "Messianische Hoffnung und politischer 'Radikalismus' in der jüdisch-hellenistischen Diaspora," in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East* (ed. David Hellholm; Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism, Uppsala, 12–17 August 1979; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1983) 655–86.

90. See, e.g., Philo *Virt.* 182; *Mos.* 1.30–31; *Spec.* 3.29.

91. *Virt.* 182; *Q. Ex.* 2.2.

The earliest Christians of Alexandria are to be placed in this variegated Jewish context. We should surmise that a variety of beliefs and practices were represented in Alexandrian Christianity almost from the beginning. If Walter Bauer and others can extrapolate backwards in time from such early second-century gnostic teachers as Basilides, Carpocrates, and Valentinus,⁹² it is equally valid to extrapolate into the first century other varieties of Christianity, including more "orthodox" ones, such as are represented in other early second-century literature.⁹³ One can plausibly trace a trajectory backwards from Clement of Alexandria and such second-century texts as the *Teachings of Silvanus* (NHC VII,4) to a first-century religious Platonism represented on the Jewish side by Philo and on the Christian side by Apollos.⁹⁴ Of course it is also highly likely that less intellectually sophisticated varieties of Christianity existed in first-century Alexandria, such as can be found in the Christian "halachic" traditions reflected in the *Epistle of Barnabas*, especially the "Two Ways" tradition,⁹⁵ and the various gospel traditions preserved in second-century texts and fragments.⁹⁶

As has already been pointed out, the canonical Gospels of Matthew and John are represented in second-century papyri found in Egypt. An array of noncanonical gospels also circulated there early on,⁹⁷ of which

92. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, esp. 48. Note that these three early teachers represent three quite different types of Christian gnosis!

93. Manfred Hornschuh rightly criticizes Bauer for his one-sidedness and points to a number of non-gnostic texts in this connection. See his *Studien zur Epistula Apostolorum* (PTS 5; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1965) esp. 114. But I do not agree with his views on the Alexandrian provenience of *Ep. Apost.* (accepted, however, by A. F. J. Klijn in his contribution to this volume). In my view *Ep. Apost.* was written in Asia Minor. For the various arguments on this question see Hornschuh's discussion, *Studien*, 99–115. The attestation of this document in Upper Egypt (Coptic version) and Ethiopia (Ethiopic version) is no argument in favor of a composition in Egypt. Asian Christian literature (e.g. Melito of Sardis) was early favored in Upper Egypt. See T. Orlandi's contribution to this volume.

94. See my article "Philo, Gnosis, and the New Testament," in *The New Testament and Gnosis: Essays in Honour of Robert McL. Wilson* (ed. A. H. B. Logan and A. J. M. Wedderburn; Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1983) 73–89. See also R. van den Broek's contribution to the present volume.

95. *Barn.* 18–20; cf. *Did.* 1–5. See esp. Robert A. Kraft, *The Didache and Barnabas*, vol. 3 of *The Apostolic Fathers* (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1965). L. W. Barnard uses *Barnabas* as an important source for reconstructing "Judaism in Egypt A.D. 70–135," in his *Studies in the Apostolic Fathers and Their Background* (New York: Schocken Books, 1966) 41–55.

96. On the early Jewish-Christian "Logos Christology" in Alexandria see Klijn's contribution to this volume. On the early Christian "theology of the Name" see discussion of Roberts's book, above.

97. Mentioned above were the Egerton fragment and P. Oxy. 1 (*Gospel of Thomas*). For these and other fragments see Edgar Hennecke and Wilhelm Schneemelcher,

at least two were probably compiled in Alexandria: the *Gospel of the Hebrews*⁹⁸ and the *Gospel of the Egyptians*.⁹⁹ The Jewish Christian character of the former is obvious, and is also reflected in the latter, even if its dominant tendency is in the direction of asceticism, a phenomenon certainly not unknown in Alexandrian Judaism.¹⁰⁰ Neither of these gospels is gnostic in any recognizable sense, and the application of such labels as "unorthodox" or "heretical" to such early Christian texts is clearly anachronistic.¹⁰¹ I would suggest that the *Gospel of the Hebrews* was compiled for the Jewish Christians of Alexandria, and the *Gospel of the Egyptians* for the "Egyptians" who were predominant in the Rhakotis district of Alexandria. The latter seems to be a reflex of early missionary activity on the part of Jewish Christians among their Gentile neighbors.¹⁰²

The earliest Christians in Alexandria doubtless lived in the same areas of the city as the other Jews there, and can be presumed to have participated in the life of the synagogues. They would also have worshiped in house churches, such as are known elsewhere from New Testament sources.¹⁰³ The final split between church and synagogue in Alexandria was late in coming, and was probably not complete until the time of the Jewish revolt under Trajan (115–17 C.E.), as a result of which the Jewish community, probably even including some Christians, was virtually exterminated.¹⁰⁴ It is around this time that the

NTApō (trans. R. McL. Wilson; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963) 1:91–116. Cf. also the "Secret Gospel of Mark," discussed above. Use of the terms "canonical" and "non canonical" for literature of this period is, of course, anachronistic.

98. See Hennecke and Schneemelcher, *NTApō* 1:158–65; cf. Koester, *Introduction* 1:223–24.

99. See Hennecke and Schneemelcher, *NTApō* 1:166–78; cf. Koester, *Introduction* 1:229–30. Koester notes the relationship among the *Gospel of the Hebrews*, the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, and the *Gospel of Thomas*, and argues that *Thomas* is a source used by the other two (pp. 224, 230), a view I find somewhat difficult to accept. It could be argued that the three gospels share common Jewish Christian traditions; but this is a problem that deserves further study.

100. Including Philo himself. See esp. his description of the Therapeutae in *Cont.*

101. Pace Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, 50–53.

102. This represents a modification of Bauer's hypothesis (*Orthodoxy and Heresy*, 50–53). Cf. also Carl Andresen, "Siegreiche Kirche' in Aufstieg des Christentums: Untersuchungen zu Eusebius von Caesarea und Dionysios von Alexandrien," in ANRW (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1979) 2/23/1:387–495, esp. 440.

103. Acts 2:46; 5:42; 20:20; Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Phlm. 2. For a social description of the house churches in the Pauline mission see Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1983) 75–81. Much of what Meeks discusses would apply also to Alexandrian Christianity.

104. See Tcherikover's discussion in *CPJ* 1:85–93. That Alexandrian Jewish apocalypticism was involved in this revolt has been forcefully argued by Hengel ("Messianische

Epistle of Barnabas is to be dated, a document that is almost certainly of Alexandrian origin. It contains a plethora of Jewish halachic and haggadic traditions but now edited with a distinctly anti-Judaic bias, reflecting the final split between church and synagogue.¹⁰⁵

EARLY CHRISTIAN LOCI IN ALEXANDRIA

The evidence for the existence of church buildings in Alexandria¹⁰⁶ before the fourth century is very slim.¹⁰⁷ That such church buildings existed in Egypt before the fourth century is indicated in reports of the massive destruction of churches during the Diocletianic persecutions,¹⁰⁸ and there is some documentary evidence for the existence of church buildings (with the use of the term *ekklēsia* for such buildings) in Egypt as early as the late third century.¹⁰⁹ So it is not unreasonable to suppose that there were church buildings in Alexandria as early as the third century, though it is not easy to determine where they were.

In an important article on third-century Alexandrian Christianity Carl Andresen has made a very interesting case for locating both the catechetical school and the center of ecclesiastical Christianity in general in the main Greek area of the city, in the area then called Bruchium (*Pyroucheion*).¹¹⁰ It may nevertheless be interesting to note

Hoffnung"). On Jewish-Christian relations in the empire, esp. in Alexandria, see Robert L. Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind: A Study of Cyril of Alexandria's Exegesis and Theology* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1971) 9-68.

105. See esp. Barnard, "Judaism in Egypt." Bauer's desperate attempt to connect *Barnabas* with "Gnosticism" must be categorically rejected. Indeed it could be argued that the use of the term *gnosis* in *Barnabas* is anti-gnostic, centered as it is on the "way of righteousness" (*Barn.* 5.4) and involving a christological interpretation of the Old Testament as well as an emphasis on right conduct. For an interesting theory placing the *Epistle of Jude* in Alexandria between 120 and 131, see now J. J. Gunther, "The Alexandrian *Epistle of Jude*," *NTS* 30 (1984) 549-62.

106. For discussion of the various churches in ancient Alexandria and their attestation see esp. *DNGT* 1/1:165-78; and *RAEGR* 1:216-17.

107. There is scattered archaeological evidence from the fourth century and later. Barbara Tkaczow reported on "Archeological Sources for the Earliest Churches in Alexandria" at the Third International Conference of Coptic Studies in Warsaw (August 1984) and is preparing a volume on this topic to appear in a future issue of *Etudes et Travaux*, published by the Centre d'archéologie méditerranéenne de l'Académie polonaise des sciences. Epiphanius lists the Alexandrian churches known to him (*Haer.* 69.2; *PG* 42.204-5): "Caesarea" (a church built on the site of the Caesareum); "of Dionysios"; "of Theonas" (see below); "of Pierios"; "of Serapion"; "of Persaea"; "of Dizya"; "of Mendidion" (Bendidion, see below); "of Annianus"; "of Baukalis" (see below); "and others."

108. Eusebius *H. E.* 8.2

109. See Judge and Pickering, "Papyrus Documentation," 59-61, 69.

110. See Andresen, "Siegreiche Kirche," 428-52.

that the earliest documentable church, that of Saint Theonas (bishop 282–300),¹¹¹ lay in the northwestern part of the city, in the area we have identified as Delta, one of the “Jewish” quarters in the first century. This may imply a Jewish Christian presence in that area of the city before the time of the building of that church, and that presence could have extended back to the first century. As has already been indicated, the earliest Christians would have lived side by side with other Jews, sharing the life of the synagogues and worshiping in house churches.¹¹²

A look at the places mentioned in the *Acts of Mark* bears out this assumption, namely, that the earliest Christians lived in close proximity to centers of Jewish life. (It must be admitted, of course, that the authenticity of the geographical references in that writing is no guarantee of its historicity.) The first Alexandrian place mentioned is Pharos (chap. 2), an island separated from the mainland by a seven-stade causeway (the Heptastadion), where the famous lighthouse was located.¹¹³ It should not be forgotten that this island was the traditional site of the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek and the site of an annual Jewish festival commemorating that achievement.¹¹⁴

The next place mentioned is Mendion (or Bennidion),¹¹⁵ where Mark is said to have met the cobbler, Ananias (chap. 3). The place in question is named after a temple, usually referred to as the Bendideion, but probably devoted to the Egyptian god Mendes rather than the Thracian goddess Bendis.¹¹⁶ The site in question became the location of a church, first referred to as Mendidiou,¹¹⁷ and subsequently named for Saint Athanasius. Calderini suggests that this site was located in the eastern part of the city, but Adriani is probably correct in placing it in the northwest, not far from the Heptastadion and the western agora.¹¹⁸ It

111. See esp. *DNGT* 1/1:169–70; and *RAEGR* 1:217.

112. See discussion above.

113. For ancient references see *DNGT* 1/1:156–64; *RAEGR* 1:234–35.

114. See esp. *Ep. Arist.* 301–9; *Philo Mos.* 2.35–42.

115. Cf. n. 40. Another form of the name is Mendesion, which occurs, e.g., in Halkin, “Actes inédits,” instead of Mendion or Bennidion (chap. 16, p. 358). Cf. also Ps.-Callisthenes 1.31 and variant readings in the mss., on which see Leif Bergson, *Der griechische Alexanderroman: Rezension β* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1965) 46.

116. On “Bendideion,” see *DNGT* 1/1:101, 166; *RAEGR* 1:210, 216. Von Lemm argues for “Mendes” rather than “Bendis” on the strength of a Coptic fragment of the *Acts of Mark*; see “Topographie,” 253–55. Cf. also the Coptic fragment published by Helmut Satzinger, *BKU* 323. Cf. n. 118 below.

117. Cf. Epiphanius *Haer.* 69.2.

118. *DNGT* 1/1:101, 166; and *RAEGR* 1:210, 216. It is possibly of interest to note here than an unpublished Coptic text in the Pierpont Morgan Library (M 606, p. 39 of the ms.) puts Mark’s meeting of the cobbler Anianus in the agora. This text is cited by H. Satzinger in his publication of *BKU* 323. The text is an encomium on Peter and Paul attributed to Severianus of Gabala.

would thus have been located in one of the two "Jewish" quarters (Delta, as suggested above).

The most important of the early Christian holy places in Alexandria was undoubtedly Boukolou, where, according to the *Acts of Mark*, the earliest Christians had their place of worship (chap. 4) and where the saint met his death and was buried (chaps. 7, 10).¹¹⁹ Here was erected the *martyrium* of Saint Mark, attested from the late fourth century on.¹²⁰ Here was the church in which Arius served as a presbyter in the early fourth century. Epiphanius refers to it as "the church of *Baukalis*,"¹²¹ which I take to be a corruption, or variant, of Boukolos.

The word *boukolos* means "cowherd." Thus "the places of the *boukolos*" could mean something like "cow pastures," *boukolia*.¹²² Now there is no doubt that the memorial to Saint Mark was located in the northeastern part of town ("in the eastern district," "beside the sea, beneath the cliffs"),¹²³ probably near the site of the present College of St. Mark run by the Christian Brothers. By the fourth century, when our documentation begins, the area in question was outside the city, a place for "cow pastures." But in the first century this area was the main Jewish neighborhood, described in glowing terms by Josephus.¹²⁴ This Jewish quarter was presumably destroyed during the time of the rebellion under Trajan (115-17), and in the fourth century the area in question probably lay well outside the main part of the city. Exactly what the condition of the city wall was at that time, or even where it

119. On *Boukolou topoi* - *Boukolia*, see DNGT 1/1:105; RAEGR 1:210.

120. See discussion above and nn. 53-60.

121. *Haer.* 69.1 (PG 42.201) and 69.2 (PG 42.204-5). A *baukalis* is a vessel used for cooling water or wine. See LSJ 311b.

122. The word *boukolos* has secondary meanings associated with the worship of Dionysos (in his bull manifestation): "worshiper of Dionysos." In Orphic-Dionysiac cult associations the *boukolos* seems to function as a leading officer, as indicated, e.g., in two Orphic hymns (1.10; 31.7); see A. Athanassakis, *The Orphic Hymns: Text, Translation, and Notes* (SBLTT 12; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1977) ix, 6-7, 44-45, 113. We might therefore see in the place name Boukolou an indication that a Dionysiac shrine was located in the area. In fact some Dionysiac artifacts have been found here (see below, n. 129). Alternatively, an indication of Sarapis worship might be implied, for a *boukolos tou Osarapi* is a "devotee of Sarapis" (see LSJ 324b, and references cited) and we recall the explicit mention of a Sarapis festival coincident with the death of Mark (*Acts* 7). Yet another explanation of the place name Boukolou is possible: the name *Boukoloi* was given to a group of bandits living in the Delta area outside Alexandria. Dio Cassius (72.4.2) reports an assault of *Boukoloi* on Alexandria in 172 or 173 C.E. For references see Sethe, "*Boukoloi*," in PW 3/1:1013.

123. *Acts of Mark* 10 and 5. See DNGT 1/1:105; RAEGR 1:210. For the later history of this and other churches dedicated to Saint Mark, see M. Chaîne, "L'Eglise de saint-Marc a Alexandrie construite par le patriarche Jean de Samanoud," ROC 24 (1924) 372-86.

124. See discussion above and n. 75.

was, is not clear.¹²⁵ The Arab wall built in the ninth century, traces of which still remain, enclosed a much smaller area of the city than had been the case in the first century. The area of the first-century Jewish quarter lies well outside its perimeter.

One other place name mentioned in the *Acts of Mark* (chap. 9) calls for comment: Angeloi, where Mark's body was to be burned. The name Angelion is an alternate name for a church built in the sixth century in honor of Saint John the Baptist at the site of the great Serapeum. The Serapeum, a magnificent structure whose ruined foundations still remain, was destroyed by Bishop Theophilus in 391 C.E. It was located in the Rhakotis district of Alexandria, the Egyptian quarter. If there was a place called Angeloi, it would have been located near Boukolou, as the context in the *Acts of Mark* demands.¹²⁶ But it is possible that our extant versions are corrupt at that point,¹²⁷ and the name Angeloi may have crept into the text under the impact of the name of the church at the site of the Serapeum, perhaps under the influence of the references in the text to the festival of the god Sarapis. Traditions related to the mission and death of Saint Mark are, in any case, closely associated geographically with that area of Alexandria which, in the first century, was the main Jewish quarter. Christian activity in that area at that time would have been carried out under the shadow of the great synagogue, the "glory of Israel."¹²⁸

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the preceding discussion I have attempted to add to the growing scholarly consensus regarding the Jewish character of earliest Christianity in Egypt, first of all by sifting the earliest Christian traditions regarding the establishment of Christianity there, specifically in

125. Dio Cassius reports (22.16.15) that the walls of Alexandria were destroyed as a result of the disturbances in the time of Aurelian (272 C.E.). On the city walls see *DNGT* 1/1:152-54; *RAEGR* 1:227-28. E. Breccia claims that the wall was rebuilt in the second century by the emperors Hadrian and Antoninus (*Alexandrea ad Aegyptum* [Bergamo: Istituto Italiano d'Arti Grafiche, 1922] 71), i.e., after the destructions during the revolt of 115-17; and a map of third- and fourth-century Alexandria produced in 1893 by Sieglin (repr. in *RAEGR* 2, tavola 2) shows the eastern wall extending in a straight line down from Lochias, coinciding at one stretch with the eastern part of the Arab wall. I do not know the basis for these judgments, though it is well known that Hadrian sponsored a considerable amount of construction during his reign. On this see, e.g., *RAEGR* 1:27-28.

126. See *DNGT* 1/1:88, 116; *RAEGR* 1:206, 216.

127. The Bollandist editors of the *Acts* suggest that the original reading was *eis ton aigialon*, "to the sea-shore." See *Acts Sanctorum*, 12.352. Cf. the phrase *eis aigialous* in Philo Flacc. 56 (cf. n. 73).

128. See discussion above and n. 84.

Alexandria. I have tried to show that Alexandrian Judaism itself was a variegated phenomenon in the first century, and that early Christianity there also would have displayed a degree of religious and theological variety, leading to the varieties of Christianity that appear more clearly in our second-century sources. I have stressed that the history of Christianity in Egypt, at least until the time of the Jewish revolt against Trajan (115–17), is intimately entwined with the history of the Jewish community there. Accordingly, I have attempted also to provide a sketch of what can be known regarding the main centers of Jewish life in Alexandria and the areas of the city where Jews were concentrated. We have also seen that the earliest identifiable Christian sites and holy places in the city are associated topographically with centers of Jewish life in the first-century city.

Much remains to be done, even if the possibilities are necessarily limited. More can be done in the analysis of our literary sources, and perhaps more can be done, too, in the realm of archaeology. Archaeological research is virtually excluded in the western part of the city, which has been continuously inhabited over the centuries and is now densely populated. As to the area of Alexandria where the main first-century Jewish quarter was located, no systematic archaeological excavations have been done there, apart from some limited probes that have turned up nothing identifiably Jewish or Christian.¹²⁹ Areas for potential archaeological excavation include the Shallalat Gardens, especially north of Horriya Street (ancient Via Canopica), or the vicinity of the modern non-Muslim cemeteries, especially north of the Latin cemetery, where the famous Alabaster Tomb was found.¹³⁰ Underwater excavations might be feasible offshore, east of ancient Lochias (modern Silsileh), where Ptolemaic-period foundations can be seen just beneath the surface of the sea. (Alexandria has subsided some four meters over the last two millennia.)

129. During the course of the demolition of the ninth-century Arab walls in 1902, G. Botti found in what is now the Shallalat Gardens the base of a statue with a dedicatory inscription to Ptolemy V Epiphanes (*Inscriptiones Graecae Aegypti*, no. 31). Nearby, in 1905, E. Breccia found fragments of a statue group, with Dionysos and a faun, now in the Graeco-Roman Museum (cat. 10694–95), and in another location in the vicinity a fragment of an obelisk. For a summary of the finds, with locations, see A. Adriani, "Saggio di una pianta archeologica di Alessandria," in *Annuario del Museo Greco-Romano* 1 (1932–33) 55–96, esp. 86–87.

130. This tomb, of the Ptolemaic period, has been variously identified, e.g., as the Nemesion destroyed by the Jews in 117 C.E. (Breccia) and as the *Soma*, or Tomb of Alexander the Great (Adriani). It is probably just a private tomb. See Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* 2:108 n. 263 for references; and cf. *RAEGR* 1:242–45.

But the limitations upon future expansion of our knowledge of Judaism and Christianity in first-century Alexandria must finally be acknowledged. Perhaps we shall never be able finally to lift that "obscurity that veils the early history of the Church in Egypt."¹³¹

131. Roberts, *Manuscript*, 1.

APPENDIX: ANCIENT ALEXANDRIA (MAP)

The map presented here is essentially that published by A. Adriani as tavola A in *RAEGR* 1:269. It, in turn, is largely based on the "Carte de l'Antique Alexandrie et de ses fauborgs," published by Mahmoud-Bey in 1866 (reproduced by Adriani as tavola 3 in *RAEGR*, vol. 2). It should be stressed at the outset that many reconstructions of the topography of Alexandria have been attempted, and many maps have been published, often with strikingly different interpretations. Adriani has published some of the most important maps in his *RAEGR* 2:tav. 3-5). Since then others have been published, of which the most useful (which has heavily influenced my own reconstruction) is that of Andresen, published as a foldout in his article, "Siegreiche Kirche" (between pp. 440 and 441).

The longitudinal and latitudinal streets shown here, as well as the placement of the city walls, are the reconstruction of Mahmoud-Bey, but his work has often been challenged. Especially problematical is his placement of the eastern wall, which also, of course, affects our understanding of the extent of the ancient Jewish quarter. The alternative placement shown here midway between the Arab wall and Mahmoud-Bey's is that of E. Breccia. (His map is reproduced as fig. 12, tav. 5, in *RAEGR*, vol. 2.) The best discussion of the topography of Ptolemaic Alexandria, absolutely indispensable, is that of P. M. Fraser (*Ptolemaic Alexandria* 1:7-37, with voluminous documentation in the notes in vol. 2). His map (foldout, facing p. 8 in vol. 1) is also very useful. Fraser maintains a very healthy skepticism regarding earlier attempts to reconstruct the topography of Alexandria, especially that of Mahmoud-Bey.

I might add that my own understanding of the topography of ancient Alexandria has been aided by a visit to Alexandria in the spring of 1982 and by conversations with the director of the Polish excavations of Alexandria, Dr. Mieczystaw Rodziewicz.

I present here only those sites that are of immediate relevance to the various items discussed in my essay.

Key:

- | | |
|---|-----------------------|
| 1. Pharos Lighthouse | 7. Alabaster Tomb |
| 2. <i>Martyrium</i> of St. Mark in Boukolou | 8. St. Theonas Church |
| 3. Caesarium | 9. Gymnasium |
| 4. Kibotos Harbor | 10. Arab Wall |
| 5. Western Agora | 11. Serapeum |
| 6. Bendideion, St. Athanasius Church | |

ANCIENT ALEXANDRIA



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